

Arts Practices for Inclusion 2025–26 Facilitation Research and Community Practice

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Preface

This volume brings together two interconnected dimensions of the Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) programme: a research analysis of practitioner facilitation and a set of snapshots from community inclusion projects implemented across India. Together, these sections offer insight into both the lived practice and the reflective inquiry that shape the API approach.

The community projects represented here were facilitated by practitioners working across diverse contexts with children, young people, neurodivergent individuals, persons with disabilities, elderly residents in care environments, and participants from socio-economically vulnerable backgrounds. Through music, movement, visual arts, storytelling, theatre, play, and collaborative activities, these initiatives created spaces where participants could express themselves, interact with one another, and experience meaningful inclusion.

Alongside these project snapshots, this volume presents findings from a research analysis of practitioner facilitation conducted during the 2025–26 cohort of the API programme. The study examined facilitation reports from practitioners implementing arts-based sessions across multiple community contexts, engaging approximately 269 participants. The analysis explores how arts-based practices shape participation, relational engagement, and inclusive learning environments.

The findings highlight how the arts function as a powerful language for connection, enabling individuals with varied communication styles, abilities, and life experiences to participate meaningfully. The research also reveals significant shifts in practitioner facilitation, with many moving from instruction-driven approaches toward more responsive and relational modes of engagement, where the facilitator's role becomes one of holding space for collective exploration rather than directing activity.

Across contexts, artistic processes created multiple entry points for participation, fostered empathy and peer support, and enabled participants to access emotional expression and self-regulation through sensory and embodied experiences.

At the heart of the Arts Practices for Inclusion programme lies a simple yet profound belief: inclusion is not merely about access or participation, but about creating environments where individuals feel safe enough to express themselves, free enough to choose their level of engagement, and supported enough to experience a genuine sense of belonging. The arts offer a shared language through which these possibilities can emerge.

This volume therefore brings together both practice and reflection, offering insights for educators, artists, facilitators, therapists, and community practitioners interested in exploring the potential of arts-based approaches to inclusion.

Acknowledgements

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We extend our deep appreciation to Dr. Gitanjali G Govindrajan, Programme Director, whose vision, leadership, and commitment have shaped the philosophy and direction of the API programme. Her guidance has fostered a learning ecosystem where arts-based inclusion is explored with reflection, care, and rigor.

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Arts Practices for Inclusion Practitioner Facilitation Research Report Batch 2025–26

Executive Summary

This research report presents an analysis of facilitation practice undertaken by practitioners in the Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) training programme during the 2025–26 cohort. The report examines how practitioners implemented arts-based facilitation across diverse social contexts and how participants engaged with the arts as a medium for inclusion.

The analysis draws upon facilitation reports submitted by 18 practitioners, covering two terms of field practice. These practitioners facilitated sessions across a variety of settings including alternative schools, organisations supporting persons with disabilities, residential care environments, and community-based learning spaces.

Across these contexts, practitioners collectively engaged approximately 269 participants, including neurodivergent children, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, elderly residents in care homes, and participants from socio-economically vulnerable backgrounds.

The findings indicate that the arts functioned as a powerful language for fostering participation, expression, and relational engagement across diverse groups. Participants engaged with visual expression, movement, rhythm, storytelling, theatre, and play in ways that enabled communication beyond conventional verbal frameworks.

Thematic analysis of facilitation reports revealed several key insights:

- practitioners experienced significant transformation in their approach to facilitation, moving from instruction-based methods toward responsive and relational practice
- the arts created multiple entry points for participation, allowing individuals with varied communication styles and abilities to engage meaningfully
- collaborative artistic processes fostered empathy, peer support, and collective belonging
- sensory and embodied engagement enabled participants to access emotional expression and self-regulation

The research suggests that arts-based facilitation, when grounded in principles of inclusion and relational engagement, can cultivate environments where participants encounter one another beyond social labels or perceived limitations.

The findings contribute to the growing discourse on arts-based methodologies in inclusive education, community practice, and therapeutic environments.

Introduction

Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) positions the arts as a relational language through which individuals and communities can explore identity, connection, and shared experience. Within this framework, the arts are not treated as disciplines restricted to aesthetic production or performance. Rather, they function as experiential processes that allow participants to encounter themselves and others through imagination, sensory exploration, and collaborative creation.

The API framework emphasises that inclusive practice cannot be achieved solely through structural access or policy directives. Inclusion emerges through relational processes where individuals feel recognised, heard, and able to participate authentically. The arts provide such relational spaces because they allow multiple forms of expression and interpretation.

The API textbook articulates that artistic processes enable participants to access forms of knowledge that are experiential, embodied, and relational rather than purely cognitive. Artistic engagement therefore allows individuals to encounter differences not as deficit but as diversity within a shared creative field.

The practitioner training programme prepares facilitators to hold such spaces across diverse social contexts.

This report analyses the facilitation experiences of the API Batch 2025–26 cohort in order to understand how these principles manifest in practice.

Research Objectives

The research aims to:

1. analyse how practitioners implemented arts practices within different community contexts
2. examine participant engagement with arts-based activities
3. identify patterns in facilitator learning and development
4. explore how arts practices contribute to inclusion and relational engagement

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses qualitative thematic analysis to examine practitioner facilitation reports.

Facilitation reports function as reflective narratives documenting:

- participant contexts

- session objectives
- facilitation strategies
- participant responses
- practitioner reflections

These reports provide rich qualitative data on the lived processes of arts-based facilitation.

Data Sources

Source	Quantity
Practitioners	18
Approx participants	269

Table 1: Data Sources

Data Analysis Process

The analysis involved three stages:

Stage 1: Familiarisation

All facilitation reports were read multiple times to understand the range of contexts and practices.

Stage 2: Coding

Key patterns relating to facilitation approaches, participant engagement, and group dynamics were identified.

Stage 3: Thematic Development

Codes were grouped into broader themes representing recurring patterns across practitioners.

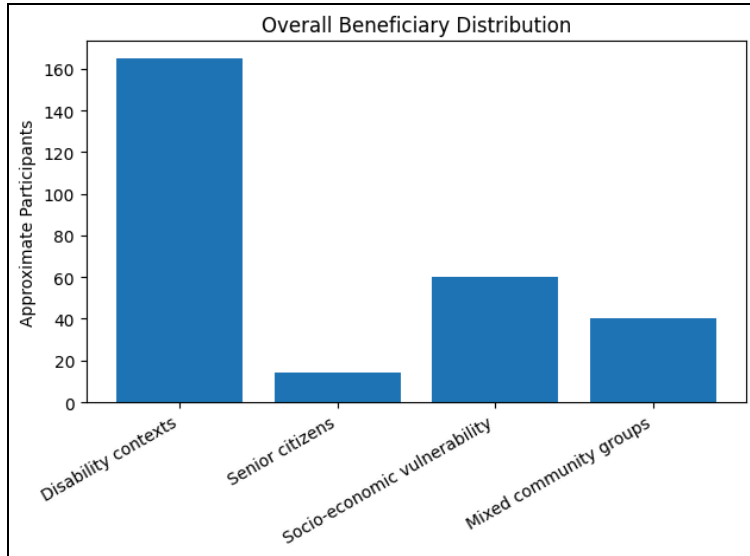
Practitioner and Participant Overview

Context	Practitioners	Approx Participants
Neurodivergent children	6	90
Adults with intellectual & developmental disabilities	6	75
Inclusive schools	2	30
Senior citizens	1	14
Mixed disability residential groups	2	40
Children with trauma contexts	1	20

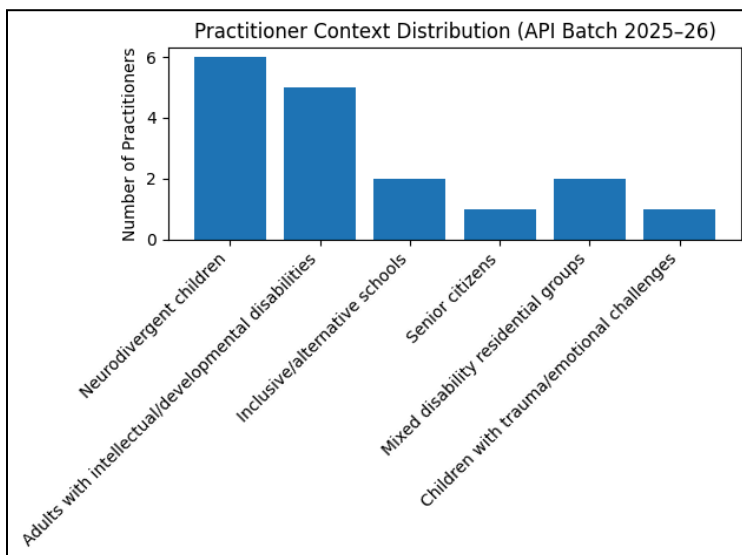
Table 2: Participant Context Distribution

Category	Approx Participants
Disability contexts	165
Socio-economic vulnerability	60
Mixed community groups	40
Senior citizens	14

Table 3: Participant Demographics



Graph 1: Overall beneficiary distribution across contexts



Graph 2: Distribution of API Participants across contexts

Theoretical Framing

The conceptual foundation for this analysis is grounded in the Arts Practices for Inclusion framework.

The API philosophy recognises the arts as processes through which individuals can explore identity, emotion, and relational presence. The framework emphasises experiential learning where participants engage through sensory, imaginative, and embodied modes of knowing.

Within API, artistic processes are structured through a facilitation arc consisting of:

- circling
- warming
- creating
- closing

The arts enable multiple entry points for engagement because they operate across sensory modalities and symbolic expression. Participants therefore engage through movement, sound, colour, gesture, and narrative.

This multiplicity allows individuals with varied abilities and communication styles to participate meaningfully.

Thematic Analysis

The facilitation reports were examined through thematic analysis in order to identify recurring patterns across practitioner experiences and participant engagement. Thematic analysis enables the systematic identification of patterns in qualitative data and helps illuminate underlying processes within complex social and educational environments.

In this study, facilitation reports were read iteratively to identify themes relating to practitioner learning, participant engagement, group dynamics, and the role of the arts in fostering inclusive environments. Each report contained rich narrative descriptions of sessions, reflections on participant responses, and observations about the facilitation process. By analysing these narratives collectively, it became possible to identify shared patterns across practitioners working in very different contexts.

The themes presented below do not represent isolated observations but rather interconnected processes that emerged repeatedly across reports. Together, they reveal how arts practices create spaces for relational engagement, creative exploration, and inclusive participation.

Theme 1

Facilitator Transformation

One of the most prominent patterns across the facilitation reports is the transformation experienced by practitioners themselves. Many practitioners began the facilitation process with assumptions shaped by traditional educational or training environments, where the facilitator's role is often understood as directing activities, explaining instructions clearly, and ensuring that participants follow a predetermined structure.

However, as sessions unfolded, practitioners gradually discovered that arts-based facilitation within the API framework requires a different orientation. Rather than controlling the direction of sessions, facilitators learned to cultivate attentiveness to the group's energy, responses, and emerging dynamics. This shift often occurred through moments when activities did not proceed as expected.

For example, one practitioner described planning a carefully structured visual exploration activity using natural materials. The intention was for participants to experiment with colours extracted from flower petals and observe the transformation of pigments. Instead, several children began rhythmically pounding the petals against the table surface, producing sound and laughter. The facilitator initially attempted to redirect the group toward the planned outcome but soon recognised that the spontaneous rhythm created a collective moment of engagement. What began as a visual arts exercise evolved into a playful rhythmic experience shared across the group.

Moments such as these prompted practitioners to reconsider their role within the session. Rather than directing participants toward specific outcomes, facilitators began to recognise the importance of holding space for exploration. The facilitator's role gradually shifted from that of instructor to that of observer, listener, and participant within the creative process.

Several practitioners reflected that this transformation required them to become comfortable with uncertainty. The arts-based facilitation process often involves unpredictable moments, where participants reinterpret activities in ways that were not anticipated in the original plan. Learning to trust these moments and allow them to unfold became an important part of practitioner growth.

Through repeated facilitation experiences, practitioners began to recognise that meaningful engagement often emerges not from carefully controlled activities but from moments when participants are able to respond authentically to the creative environment.

Theme 2

The Arts as a Language Beyond Words

Another powerful theme emerging across the facilitation reports is the role of the arts as a language beyond verbal communication. Many participant groups included individuals who experienced difficulty with conventional forms of verbal expression due to cognitive, sensory, or emotional factors. In such contexts, the arts created alternative pathways through which participants could communicate their thoughts, feelings, and relational awareness.

Participants engaged with visual expression, movement, rhythm, storytelling, and gesture in ways that allowed them to express themselves without relying solely on speech. These forms of expression often revealed emotional and social awareness that might not otherwise have been visible within traditional communication frameworks.

In one facilitation setting involving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, a practitioner described a clay exploration activity in which participants were invited to shape simple forms and pass them around the group. One participant, who rarely spoke during sessions, quietly collected the clay moulds and began distributing them to others in the circle. After ensuring that each participant had received one, he kept the final mould for himself and smiled briefly at the facilitator. The gesture was subtle but meaningful; it demonstrated awareness of the group and an intention to ensure that others were included before attending to his own participation.

In another session involving rhythm instruments, participants began experimenting with shakers and drums without any formal coordination. Gradually, the group began responding to one another's sounds, synchronising beats and pauses. What initially appeared to be a collection of individual sounds evolved into a shared rhythm that connected the group. Participants who had not previously interacted began looking toward one another and adjusting their tempo to match the emerging pattern.

Such experiences illustrate how the arts enable communication through embodied and sensory processes. Participants who may struggle to express themselves verbally can still communicate intention, attention, and relational awareness through artistic interaction.

Theme 3

Collective Creation and the Emergence of Belonging

Across many facilitation contexts, the arts created opportunities for participants to experience belonging through collective creation. Unlike many structured learning environments that emphasise individual performance or evaluation, arts-based sessions often invite participants to create together.

Collaborative activities such as group rhythm circles, shared drawings, and collective storytelling allowed participants to contribute to a shared process rather than producing individual outputs. This shift from individual performance to collective creation helped reduce the pressure associated with "getting things right" and encouraged participants to focus on the experience of being present with others.

One practitioner described a session in which participants were invited to create a large collaborative artwork on a single sheet of paper. Initially, participants hesitated, unsure about where or how to begin. Some individuals worked quietly in small sections of the page, while others observed from a distance. Gradually, participants began responding to one another's drawings by extending shapes, connecting colours, or adding patterns that complemented existing elements. The artwork evolved organically as a collective expression rather than a set of separate contributions.

Another facilitation report described a rhythm activity in which participants were invited to pass a beat around the circle. At one point during the activity, a participant appeared withdrawn and hesitant to play their instrument. Two other participants noticed the hesitation and encouraged the group to pause and

clap for the participant before continuing. The moment was brief but significant. It demonstrated that participants had begun to notice one another and respond with empathy.

Such experiences suggest that collaborative arts processes can foster social awareness and mutual recognition within groups. The shared act of creating together allows participants to encounter one another not through labels or roles but through the experience of participation.

Theme 4

Emotional Expression and Regulation Through the Arts

Many practitioners observed that the arts created opportunities for participants to explore emotional experiences in ways that felt safe and non-threatening. Emotional expression often emerged through symbolic or imaginative processes rather than direct verbal discussion.

In one session, participants were invited to draw or paint what they described as their “happy place.” The activity prompted participants to reflect on environments or memories associated with comfort and safety. Some participants drew landscapes such as beaches or gardens, while others used abstract colours and shapes to represent feelings rather than places. During the sharing circle that followed, participants spoke about what their drawings meant to them, revealing personal memories and emotional associations.

Movement and rhythm activities also played an important role in emotional regulation. Several practitioners described alternating between high-energy activities and quieter reflective moments within sessions. For participants who experienced difficulty with attention or emotional regulation, this rhythm allowed them to release energy through movement before transitioning into calmer activities.

In one group of elderly residents, storytelling sessions often prompted recollections of past experiences. Participants shared memories associated with music, festivals, or family gatherings. These moments not only stimulated cognitive engagement but also created emotional connections among residents who discovered shared experiences.

The arts therefore provided a space where emotional experiences could surface gradually through creative exploration rather than through direct questioning.

Theme 5

Sensory Engagement and Embodied Learning

Sensory engagement emerged as a significant dimension of arts-based facilitation. Many participants responded strongly to tactile materials, sound, movement, and colour. The arts create environments where sensory exploration becomes a legitimate form of learning rather than a distraction from it.

Several practitioners described sessions in which participants became deeply absorbed in tactile exploration of materials. In one activity involving flower pigments, children experimented with crushing petals to observe how colour transferred onto paper. The tactile process of pressing and rubbing the petals created an immersive sensory experience. Participants who often struggled with sustained attention in classroom environments remained engaged for extended periods as they watched colours emerge gradually.

Movement-based activities similarly supported embodied awareness. Exercises involving mirroring or spatial exploration encouraged participants to notice how their bodies moved in relation to others. In one session, participants were invited to create simple poses in front of a mirror and observe their reflections. The activity prompted laughter, curiosity, and moments of self-recognition.

Such experiences demonstrate how embodied learning through the arts can support attention, curiosity, and presence.

Anecdotes

The facilitation reports contained numerous narrative moments illustrating shifts in participant engagement. While many of these moments were brief, together they reveal how the arts can create conditions for transformation.

Narrative Moment 1

During an early session with a group of children, one participant remained seated near the doorway and refused to join the circle. The facilitator respected the participant's choice and continued the session without insisting on participation. Over the following weeks, the participant gradually moved closer to the group during activities. Eventually, during a movement exercise involving animal gestures, the participant stood up and joined the circle spontaneously. The moment was met with gentle encouragement from peers, marking the participant's first active participation in the group.

Narrative Moment 2

In a name-and-movement activity designed to introduce participants to one another, a shy participant quietly said her name and added a small hop as her movement. The group responded with enthusiastic clapping. Encouraged by this response, she repeated the movement with greater confidence. Over subsequent sessions, the same participant began volunteering first during activities and encouraging others to participate.

Narrative Moment 3

During a puppet storytelling activity, participants were invited to create characters and imagine short narratives. One participant used a puppet to describe a character who felt angry and lonely after losing someone important. As the story unfolded, it became clear that the participant was speaking indirectly

about the loss of a relative. The activity opened a space for the group to listen and respond with empathy.

Narrative Moment 4

In a geriatric care facility, an elderly participant with limited speech spent an entire session colouring quietly. Although the participant did not participate verbally, they periodically lifted the drawing and showed it to nearby participants. Each time, they smiled broadly when someone acknowledged the drawing.

Narrative Moment 5

In a rhythm circle, participants were experimenting with different percussion instruments. Gradually the group began synchronising beats without any instruction from the facilitator. Participants began watching each other's hands and adjusting their rhythms. The resulting sound created a moment of collective focus that lasted several minutes.

Research Discussion

The findings of this research highlight several important insights for the field of arts-based inclusion.

First, the arts create environments where participation is not dependent on a single form of competence. In many conventional learning settings, communication and engagement rely heavily on verbal expression and cognitive processing. Individuals who struggle within these frameworks may therefore be perceived as disengaged or incapable. The arts challenge this assumption by enabling multiple forms of participation through sensory, symbolic, and embodied expression.

Second, facilitation within arts-based inclusion requires practitioners to adopt a relational approach rather than an instructional one. The facilitator's role is not to deliver knowledge but to create conditions where participants feel safe enough to explore, experiment, and respond to one another. This relational orientation allows participants to engage with authenticity rather than compliance.

Third, collaborative artistic processes appear to play a significant role in fostering belonging. Shared creation allows participants to encounter one another through action rather than through predefined social identities. The act of creating together invites attention, empathy, and responsiveness.

Finally, the arts create spaces where emotional experiences can emerge gradually through metaphor, symbol, and movement. Such processes allow participants to explore emotions without the pressure of articulating them directly.

Conclusion

The facilitation journeys of the API Batch 2025–26 practitioners illustrate the transformative potential of arts practices within inclusive environments. Across diverse contexts — including neurodivergent children, adults with intellectual disabilities, elderly residents, and participants from socio-economically vulnerable backgrounds — the arts created spaces for exploration, expression, and relational engagement.

Participants encountered one another through shared processes of drawing, movement, rhythm, storytelling, and play. These processes enabled communication beyond language and encouraged participants to recognise one another’s presence within the group.

Equally significant was the transformation experienced by practitioners. Through repeated facilitation experiences, practitioners began to shift from directive approaches toward responsive and relational practice. They learned to trust the creative process, to observe subtle changes in group dynamics, and to recognise the value of moments that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The findings suggest that arts-based facilitation has the potential to contribute meaningfully to inclusive education, community engagement, and therapeutic environments. By creating spaces where multiple forms of participation are welcomed, the arts enable individuals to encounter one another through imagination, empathy, and shared experience.

Ultimately, the research reaffirms a central principle of Arts Practices for Inclusion: that the arts are not merely creative activities but relational practices through which individuals and communities can explore belonging, difference, and connection.

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Overview of the Community Inclusion Projects

As part of the Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) practitioner training programme, each practitioner undertook a Community Inclusion Project within their local context. These projects formed a key practice component of the programme, allowing practitioners to apply arts-based facilitation approaches within real community environments and observe how creative engagement can support relational inclusion.

Across the cohort, practitioners worked with a wide range of communities including children, young adults, students, community groups, and individuals from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The projects were implemented across different regions of India, reflecting the adaptability of the API framework within varied social ecosystems.

Through practices such as music, movement, storytelling, theatre, visual arts, play, and collaborative community engagement, the projects created spaces where participants could explore emotions, build relationships, and engage meaningfully with others. The arts functioned not simply as activities but as shared languages of participation, enabling individuals to express themselves and connect with others beyond conventional boundaries of identity, background, or experience.

The projects demonstrated that inclusion is not merely a structural or policy goal but a relational process that unfolds through participation, dialogue, and shared creative experience. Participants were able to explore personal emotions, engage in collaborative processes, and extend their interactions beyond familiar social circles.

Collectively, the twenty-two projects illustrate how arts practices can support:

- Emotional expression and self-awareness
- Social interaction and group cohesion
- Confidence in engaging with broader communities
- Recognition of individual voice and participation
- Development of empathy and collective responsibility

These projects also highlight the role of the practitioner as a facilitator of spaces rather than a director of outcomes, enabling participants to shape their own experiences through creative exploration.

Taken together, the Community Inclusion Projects provide a rich insight into how Arts Practices for Inclusion can operate as a flexible, context-responsive framework capable of supporting inclusive engagement across diverse community settings.

Title: Community Inclusion through Arts-Based Engagement

Practitioner: Amogha Agarwal

City, State: Dehradun, Uttarakhand

Context: This project was conducted in October–November through six interactive sessions exploring how arts-based practices can support emotional awareness, social connection, and inclusion. Participants engaged in music, play, storytelling, movement, visual arts, and community activities to build expression, reflection, and a sense of belonging within the group and the wider community.

Approach: The sessions included a Djembe percussion workshop, a play and psychoeducation session on self-love and mindfulness, a storytelling and visual art activity based on *Invisible Strings*, a movement and creative thinking session, a collaborative clean-up drive with NGO MAD, and a final play session bringing two groups together.

Activities combined creative engagement with reflection. Music encouraged coordination and teamwork, storytelling and art supported emotional reflection, and movement fostered creative expression. The clean-up drive introduced civic responsibility and interaction with the broader community. Facilitation followed a person-centered approach emphasizing empathy, respect, and psychological safety.

Key Areas of Engagement: The project focused on emotional awareness, social collaboration, and inclusion. Activities such as drumming, storytelling, and visual arts helped participants explore emotions and connections. Group-based exercises strengthened teamwork and participation, while the clean-up drive encouraged environmental responsibility and community engagement.

Results and Observations: Participants showed increased openness in expressing thoughts and emotions. The Djembe and play sessions strengthened group cohesion through shared activities.

The clean-up drive allowed participants to engage with the wider community. While most participated actively, some chose to observe, which was respected as a valid form of participation to maintain psychological safety. Overall, the project strengthened trust, emotional expression, and comfort in interacting with new people and environments.

Highlights and Learnings

The project highlighted how arts-based practices can support reflection, collaboration, and community engagement. A key learning was the importance of flexible participation. Future projects could include follow-up sessions and involve participants more actively in designing activities to deepen engagement.

Title: Community Inclusion through Arts-Based Practice in a Government School

Practitioner: Anuradha Singal

City, State: Thane, Maharashtra

Context: This Community Inclusion Project was conducted as part of the Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) programme at an Urdu-medium government school in Rabodi Friends Colony, Thane, with children aged 10–13 years. The project took place across 13 sessions in a challenging context marked by inconsistent attendance, limited space, environmental noise, and minimal resources.

The aim was to support social inclusion through cooperation and shared group norms, emotional inclusion through expression and regulation, and participatory inclusion by allowing children to remain part of the group even during moments of dysregulation.

Approach: Sessions used arts-based and play-based activities including mandala colouring, origami, singing, storytelling, abstract drawing, grounding practices, and group games. Early sessions focused on building predictability through collaborative tasks, while later sessions introduced storytelling and visual art to support emotional expression.

Activities were adapted according to the group's regulation levels. When dysregulation increased, grounding exercises, imaginative activities, or quieter creative tasks were introduced. Some sessions were facilitated by external practitioners in calmer environments, which supported deeper engagement. The work was informed by Polyvagal Theory and the Person-Centered approach, emphasizing psychological safety and responsiveness.

Key Areas of Engagement: Creative activities supported regulation, collaboration, and emotional expression. Art practices provided non-verbal ways for children to express themselves, while music and rhythm supported shared attention and co-regulation.

Games encouraged turn-taking and cooperation, and storytelling opened conversations about difference, bullying, and belonging. Grounding exercises helped create moments of calm during dysregulation.

Results and Learnings: While sustained behavioural change was limited, important process-level shifts were observed. In smaller or quieter settings, children showed improved cooperation, turn-taking, and participation. Quieter children engaged more during structured sessions with multiple facilitators.

A key learning was that inclusive work requires supportive environments, predictable structure, and co-facilitation. Future initiatives could benefit from smaller groups, calmer spaces, and greater institutional awareness of neurodivergent children.

Title: Creating Circles of Care through Art Forms

Practitioner: Behroz Dumasia

City, State: Mumbai, Maharashtra

Context: This project was conducted with 15–18 girls aged 10–17 at Asha Kiran Night Shelter Home in Mumbai, a residential space for children from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds. Initial observations revealed divisions between older and younger girls, with younger participants often excluded from discussions and older ones taking directive roles. The project aimed to build trust, empathy, and a stronger sense of belonging through collaborative arts and play-based activities involving peers, staff, and other community members.

Approach: The project consisted of seven experiential sessions structured around grounding, warm-ups, collaborative creative work, and reflection. Activities included collective art-making, planning community events, collaborative cooking with staff, festive decoration projects, and peer-led games for younger children.

Participants were actively involved in planning and decision-making, using materials such as paper, recycled objects, colours, and digital resources. The facilitation approach emphasized emotional safety, peer learning, and shared responsibility.

Key Areas of Engagement: Creative collaboration was central to the sessions. Participants worked together to create decorative objects representing their shared identity and to organise community activities such as cooking and festive celebrations with day-care children.

Peer leadership also emerged strongly, with participants independently facilitating games for younger children and organising teams. Reflection activities, including letter-writing and sharing, allowed participants to express emotions, gratitude, and personal experiences.

Results and Learnings: Over time, divisions within the group softened as cooperation increased. Younger participants began voicing their ideas and taking leadership roles, while older participants showed greater support. Communication, turn-taking, and collaborative problem-solving improved across activities.

A key learning was the importance of shared leadership and voluntary participation in building trust and inclusion. The project demonstrated how arts-based and play-based activities can strengthen peer relationships and reduce hierarchical dynamics in residential care settings.

Title: Connection Circles: Inclusion through Creativity

Practitioner: Bhanuja Peddu

City, State: Hyderabad, Telangana

Context: This Community Inclusion Project was conducted with children and young adults with Autism and ADHD aged 8–24 in a school-based community setting. The core group included 13 participants, with additional participants joining across sessions. The project aimed to strengthen social cohesion, emotional sensitivity, and peer connections through arts-based engagement in a supportive and inclusive environment.

Approach: The project consisted of eight sessions using arts-based activities such as music, movement, storytelling, visual arts, cooking, and play. Activities included dance and music icebreakers, movement games, collaborative sandwich-making, puppet storytelling, gratitude art, community cleaning tasks, and reflection circles.

Sessions were designed with structured flexibility, allowing participants to communicate through gestures, drawings, or short verbal responses while engaging at their own pace. The facilitation drew on ideas from group development and community-building frameworks to support belonging and peer interaction.

Key Areas of Engagement: Creative expression formed the core of the sessions. Music, dance, storytelling, and art enabled participants to explore emotions and creativity. Movement and play supported body awareness, regulation, and collaboration.

Community-oriented activities such as cooking and cleaning encouraged teamwork and shared responsibility, while gratitude circles and reflection activities strengthened emotional awareness and appreciation of peers.

Results and Learnings: Participants gradually showed increased confidence, communication, and empathy. They became more comfortable expressing boundaries, supporting peers, and collaborating across age groups.

The project highlighted the value of flexible facilitation and multiple forms of expression to support neurodiverse participation. Overall, the sessions strengthened belonging, peer care, and emotional awareness within the group.

Title: Creative Play for Inclusion and Well-being

Practitioner: Heikrujam Gopal Meitei

City, State: Manipur

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted with diverse groups of children and youth in community settings. The sessions aimed to create safe spaces where participants could engage in creative play, express themselves freely, and build social connections. Many participants initially showed hesitation or shyness, and the activities were designed to encourage openness, joy, and emotional comfort through collaborative arts-based engagement.

Approach: The sessions followed a flexible, participant-centered facilitation approach. Each session began with circling and warm-up activities to help participants relax. Activities were adapted to the group's energy and needs, ranging from calm creative exercises to energetic play and music-based activities.

Multiple art forms were used, including rhythm games and simple instruments, role-play and storytelling, collaborative drawing and painting, and movement-based games with balloons and soft balls. These activities provided accessible ways for participants to engage regardless of prior experience.

Key Areas of Engagement: The sessions focused on self-expression, teamwork, and emotional well-being. Creative activities allowed participants to share feelings and ideas in non-judgmental ways, while group games encouraged cooperation and shared enjoyment.

Play-based engagement helped participants relax and interact more comfortably. Reflection circles at the end of sessions provided opportunities for participants to share experiences and acknowledge one another's contributions.

Results and Learnings: Participants responded positively, gradually becoming more open and communicative. Initial hesitation reduced as participants experienced a supportive and accepting group environment. By the end of sessions, many displayed visible joy, laughter, and cooperative interaction.

A key learning was that creating safe and supportive environments is more important than focusing on artistic skills. Creative play acted as an equalizing language, enabling participants to connect and contribute in their own ways.

Future plans include extending these sessions to schools, relief camps, and community centres, while also training teachers and youth volunteers to facilitate similar arts-based activities.

Title: Bridging Gaps through Arts, Play, and Collaboration: An Inclusive Community Project

Practitioner: Hiral Sagar

City, State: Mumbai, Maharashtra

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted with Mann, working with young adults aged 18–25 years with severe intellectual disabilities. Although participants shared the same environment, they often interacted only within familiar comfort zones. The project aimed to strengthen social connection, emotional sensitivity, and cooperative participation through arts-based play, movement, and shared activities.

Recognizing that individuals with severe intellectual disabilities often communicate through body language, rhythm, and sensory engagement rather than words, the sessions emphasized non-verbal expression and shared experiences as pathways for inclusion.

Approach: The project involved five group sessions with participants with severe and mild to moderate intellectual disabilities along with support staff. Each session followed a predictable structure of grounding rituals, expressive arts activities, and closing rituals to create emotional safety.

Activities included rhythmic welcome circles, mirroring exercises, drumming, sensory painting, movement-based play, and collaborative tasks such as organizing art materials. These short, repetitive, and visually demonstrated activities supported accessibility and familiarity. The approach drew on principles from Dance Movement Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapy, emphasizing the body as a primary medium of communication.

Key Areas of Engagement: Movement and rhythm activities encouraged peer awareness and relational attunement. Mirroring and rhythm circles supported non-verbal connection and shared attention.

Sensory art activities such as finger painting and collaborative murals enabled participants to explore textures and colors while engaging in shared creation. Community participation was also encouraged through collaborative tasks and playful clean-up routines.

Results and Learnings: Participants gradually showed increased engagement and social presence. Individuals who initially remained isolated began joining group circles, tolerating peer proximity, and participating in shared activities. Eye contact, imitation of movements, synchronized clapping, and shared laughter reflected emerging relational connections.

A key learning was that inclusion for individuals with severe intellectual disabilities often appears through subtle relational shifts. Predictability, repetition, and sensory awareness helped create emotionally safe spaces where participants could engage at their own pace.

Title: Creative Pathways to Inclusion: A Holistic Engagement Initiative

Practitioner: Indhu M S

City, State: Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted at Pragathi Alternative School and Learning Center with 15–18 neurodiverse children aged 7–13. It built on eight months of Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) sessions that supported emotional expression, self-regulation, and social connection. The project aimed to extend these learnings beyond the classroom by creating opportunities for children to interact with a broader community including senior students, teachers, parents, college students, and visitors.

Approach: The project included eight structured sessions designed to encourage safe and meaningful interaction with the wider school community. Activities included collaborative art installations, baking, festival dramatizations, school celebrations, interactive sessions with college students, and a field trip.

These activities encouraged communication, cooperation, and shared participation while allowing children to engage at their own comfort levels. The work was informed by Social and Emotional Learning, Polyvagal Theory, and Social Learning Theory, emphasizing emotional safety and experiential learning.

Key Areas of Engagement: Sessions focused on collaborative art-making, cultural celebrations, shared tasks, and real-world experiences. Events such as the Knowledge Fest allowed children to present their work to a wider audience, while activities like Pongal celebrations and baking encouraged teamwork and creative expression.

Interactions with college students, parents, and visitors created reciprocal learning spaces where both children and adults could engage meaningfully.

Results and Learnings: Students showed increased confidence, participation, and self-expression. Children who were initially hesitant began sharing ideas, interacting with visitors, and participating more actively in group activities. Peer support also strengthened as students supported one another during moments of anxiety.

Community members developed a deeper understanding of neurodiversity through these interactions. The project highlighted that inclusion is a relational process requiring emotional safety, flexibility, and respect for individual choice.

Title: Creative Spaces for Displaced Children in Relief Camps

Practitioner: Kumam Ranjeeta Devi

City, State: Manipur

Context: This community inclusion project worked with children aged 5–16 living in relief camps in Manipur after displacement due to the 2023 conflict. Many children had experienced disruption, loss of home, and uncertainty about their future. The project aimed to create safe spaces where children could reconnect with play, creativity, and peer interaction within the camp environment.

Approach: The sessions used arts-based and play-oriented activities to encourage expression and connection without forcing discussions about trauma. Activities included drawing, drama, music, rhythm exercises, and group games.

Children were encouraged to draw freely, act out stories, sing, create rhythms, and participate in team games. Facilitation emphasized warmth, patience, and trust-building, allowing children to engage gradually and choose their level of participation.

Key Areas of Engagement: Activities explored themes of safety, belonging, hope, and identity while allowing children to guide conversations and creative choices. Collaborative games and art activities encouraged teamwork, communication, and peer support.

Through play and artistic expression, children experienced moments of joy and normalcy despite the challenging conditions of camp life.

Results and Learnings: Over time, children who were initially withdrawn began participating more actively. Friendships developed, and shy participants started sharing ideas and joining group activities. Music and games brought visible joy, while art enabled children to express feelings that were difficult to verbalize.

Small but meaningful changes were observed, including increased cooperation, sharing of materials, and growing confidence in creative activities. The project highlighted how arts-based spaces can support emotional expression, connection, and resilience among displaced children.

Title: Arts for Healing and Inclusion in Relief Camps

Practitioner: Laishangbam Opendro Singh

City, State: Manipur

Context: This Community Inclusion Project was conducted across multiple relief camps in Bishnupur district, Manipur, in response to the ethnic crisis that began in May 2023. Around 30 sessions were held with mothers, fathers, youth, children, and children with disabilities living in relief camps. The project aimed to create safe spaces where individuals affected by conflict could express emotions, rebuild connections, and strengthen collective resilience.

Approach: Sessions used five art forms—voice, rhythm, visual arts, theatre, and play—to support creative expression and emotional release. Activities included storytelling, lullabies, clapping and drumming rhythms, drawing memories of home, theatre-based role-play, and play-based games for children.

The facilitation approach was flexible and participant-centered, allowing people to participate in ways that felt comfortable. Activities were adapted for different age groups and abilities, using culturally familiar songs, stories, and accessible materials to create inclusive spaces.

Key Areas of Engagement: The sessions explored themes of healing, resilience, identity, and hope. Storytelling allowed participants to share personal experiences and grief, while rhythm and movement supported stress release and collective bonding.

Visual art enabled participants to express memories, cultural identity, and hopes for the future. Theatre encouraged empathy and dialogue, and play-based activities helped restore joy and trust among children.

Results and Learnings: Participants responded with enthusiasm and openness. Children became more expressive and confident, while youth demonstrated creativity and teamwork. Many adults experienced emotional release and stress relief through storytelling and art-making.

The sessions fostered togetherness and hope within the camps, reconnecting participants with cultural traditions through songs and collective expression. The project highlighted the role of arts as a powerful tool for healing and community rebuilding in times of crisis, suggesting the importance of continued engagement and training local facilitators.

Title: Wholeness Through Creativity: Bridging Generations in Inclusive Harmony and Bonds

Practitioner: Meghana Kodange

City, State: Bengaluru, Karnataka

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted with senior citizens at Alder Care in Bengaluru, most of whom were above 80 years old and living with physical limitations or cognitive decline. Building on three months of Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) sessions, the project aimed to reduce isolation and foster intergenerational connections with caregivers, healthcare students, college volunteers, and children with special needs.

Approach: The project consisted of eight weekly sessions of about ninety minutes each, structured around warm-ups, adaptive creative activities, and reflection circles. Activities included visual art, music, movement, cooking, festive crafts, and adapted games.

Examples included fruit salad and sandwich-making, Christmas decoration crafts, carol singing with children, action songs with college students, adapted cricket and chair football with physiotherapy and nursing interns, rangoli-making with staff, and an interactive magic show. Activities were designed to be accessible and collaborative, allowing participation at different levels.

Key Areas of Engagement: Sessions focused on emotional connection, empathy, and intergenerational interaction. Art-making, storytelling, cooking, and music supported expression and memory recall among seniors while encouraging meaningful engagement with younger participants.

Playful activities supported mobility and coordination, while cultural practices such as rangoli and festive crafts evoked nostalgia and shared identity.

Results and Learnings: The sessions created visible joy and stronger social bonds among seniors. Many participants showed increased confidence and enjoyment in interacting with others.

Intergenerational engagement was especially impactful, with seniors sharing stories and younger participants bringing energy and companionship. The project demonstrated how creative activities can reduce isolation and foster connection. Future plans include expanding such arts-based initiatives for seniors, particularly those living with conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

Title: Arts for Inclusion and Expression in Relief Camps

Practitioner: Meinam Bharati Devi

City, State: Manipur

Context: This Community Inclusion Project was conducted across multiple relief camps and schools in Bishnupur district, Manipur, with communities affected by the ongoing ethnic conflict. The practitioner initially worked with mothers' groups but later focused on children due to challenges in gathering adults regularly. Sessions were held in locations including Khoyol Keithel Relief Camp, Santhong Community Hall Relief Camp, Takmu Water Sports Complex Relief Camp, and Thangjing Special School for the Disabled.

The project aimed to create inclusive spaces where participants could experience emotional support, social connection, and belonging through creative engagement.

Approach: Around 30 sessions were conducted using arts-based practices such as rhythm, voice, visual arts, storytelling, riddles, and play. Activities were designed to create safe, non-judgmental spaces where participants could express themselves and connect with others.

Facilitation emphasized flexibility, equal participation, and responsiveness to group needs. Activities were adapted according to available space, group size, and participant comfort, ensuring that children and participants with disabilities could engage meaningfully.

Key Areas of Engagement: Sessions focused on inclusion, emotional well-being, resilience, and creative expression. Rhythm and voice activities encouraged collective participation, while visual art and storytelling allowed participants to express personal feelings and experiences.

Play-based activities brought joy and helped build trust and communication among children, while storytelling and riddles encouraged reflection and shared learning.

Results and Learnings: Participants gradually became more open and engaged. Children showed enthusiasm and eagerness to continue the sessions, while some adults began sharing reflections and creative responses. Many participants reported emotional relief and happiness through the activities.

Moments of spontaneous singing and folk expression highlighted how arts can reconnect communities with cultural identity and collective joy. The project reinforced the value of arts-based facilitation in creating inclusive spaces that support healing and community connection.

Title: Together We Bloom – An Arts Inclusion Project

Practitioner: Minha Nazer

City, State: Calicut, Kerala

Context: “Together We Bloom” was a community-based arts initiative conducted at the Free Birds Open Shelter Home for Boys in Calicut. The project engaged boys living at the shelter along with MHAT student interns, aiming to create an inclusive environment that supported emotional resilience, social connection, and creative self-expression. Across eight sessions, the project explored how arts-based activities could foster belonging, collaboration, and personal growth among vulnerable youth.

Approach: The project used a range of arts practices including visual arts, storytelling, movement, collaborative play, and nature-based activities. Sessions were designed to be participatory and process-oriented, encouraging creativity rather than focusing on artistic outcomes.

Activities included collaborative painting, gardening in pairs, crafting bird feeders from coconut shells, nature-based art, playful games, and no-fire cooking. Facilitation emphasized psychological safety, open participation, and shared responsibility between participants and interns. Sessions were adapted to the group’s energy and emotional needs.

Key Areas of Engagement: The sessions focused on social inclusion, emotional expression, and community responsibility. Collaborative activities such as group painting and gardening encouraged teamwork and mutual respect, while playful exercises and nature-based projects fostered joy, trust, and creativity.

Activities like cleaning shared spaces and creating bird feeders extended the idea of inclusion by encouraging care for the environment and community.

Results and Learnings: Participants gradually moved from hesitation to active engagement and collaboration. The boys began participating more confidently, initiating conversations, and taking responsibility for shared projects such as caring for plants and maintaining communal spaces.

Creative activities also supported emotional expression and peer empathy, with participants encouraging one another and sharing ownership of their collective work. The project demonstrated how arts-based engagement can strengthen confidence, belonging, and community connection among young people.

Title: Creating Spaces of Joy and Safety through Arts Practices

Practitioner: Moirangthem Bidyasagar Singh

City, State: Manipur

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted with children and youth who are internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in relief camps in Manipur following the conflict that began on May 3, 2023. Sessions were held across four relief camps in shared community spaces or outdoor areas, with groups of 6–16 participants. The project aimed to create consistent spaces of safety, play, and emotional relief for young people experiencing displacement and instability.

Approach: The sessions used an integrated range of arts practices including drama, visual arts, music, storytelling, and cooperative play. Activities included role-play, drawing and collaborative mosaics, rhythm and singing games, puppetry-based storytelling, and team-based play exercises.

Facilitation emphasized psychological safety, inclusion, and participant leadership. Sessions often began with simple icebreakers and gradually encouraged participants to make creative choices and lead activities. Activities were adapted based on group mood, available space, and participants' needs.

Key Areas of Engagement: The project focused on rebuilding confidence, encouraging emotional expression, strengthening peer cooperation, and celebrating community strengths. Creative activities allowed participants to communicate feelings, explore imagination, and collaborate through play and artistic expression.

Results and Learnings: Participants showed growing enthusiasm and ownership of the sessions. Over time, they began initiating activities, supporting one another, and participating with greater confidence. The sessions fostered stronger social bonds, shared laughter, and cooperative engagement.

One notable outcome was when a group of participants gained the confidence to participate in a district-level singing competition, where they won second place. The project highlighted the value of arts-based spaces in supporting joy, connection, and resilience in crisis contexts.

Title: Building Community and Belonging through Arts Practices

Practitioner: Ngangom Umakanta Singh

City, State: Manipur

Context: This community inclusion project involved over 30 sessions with more than 100 participants, primarily children and youth who are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in relief camps following the Manipur conflict. Sessions were conducted in relief camps and with students from a nearby government school. The practitioner also worked with teachers, introducing them to the principles of the Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) approach so they could apply these methods in their classrooms.

Approach: The sessions used participatory arts practices including collaborative visual arts, rhythm and music activities, movement-based games, storytelling, and play. Activities emphasized non-verbal communication, shared creation, and cooperative participation.

Each session followed a simple structure of circling, warming up, creating, and reflecting, helping establish safety and routine. The facilitation focused on participation and connection rather than artistic skill, encouraging everyone to contribute in ways that felt comfortable.

Key Areas of Engagement: The sessions aimed to build community, trust, and communication. Collaborative art-making, rhythm exercises, and storytelling supported creative expression while encouraging teamwork and empathy. The activities promoted non-judgmental participation and shared exploration.

Results and Learnings: Participants who were initially shy gradually became more confident and engaged. Over time, stronger group cohesion emerged, with participants supporting one another and celebrating shared creations.

Laughter, collaborative problem-solving, and growing participation from quieter members reflected a shift toward a more connected community. The project highlighted how arts-based practices can create spaces of belonging, expression, and confidence. Future plans include training community volunteers and teachers to sustain these practices in relief camps and schools.

Title: The School of Inclusion

Practitioner: Nishita Shetty

City, State: Mumbai, Maharashtra

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted at Suryoday Trust in Bhayander, Mumbai, with adults aged 18–45 with Intellectual Disabilities, Down Syndrome, and Autism. Although participants belonged to the same organisation, they usually interacted only within their own activity groups. The project aimed to create inclusive spaces where individuals from different groups could connect through shared creative experiences.

The initiative took place soon after the centre had relocated, requiring participants to adjust to a new environment. Sessions were adapted to these circumstances while maintaining the focus on meaningful engagement and inclusion.

Approach: The project used arts-based practices including visual arts, rhythm exercises, movement, storytelling, and collaborative play to encourage interaction and communication. Activities such as name games, expressive drawing, rhythm-making, and collaborative artwork helped participants gradually build familiarity and comfort.

Facilitation emphasized accessibility through simple instructions, visual demonstrations, and flexible session structures. Reflection circles and sensory relaxation activities supported emotional regulation and allowed participants to share experiences verbally or non-verbally.

Key Areas of Engagement: Sessions focused on promoting interaction across different groups, encouraging emotional expression through creative mediums, and strengthening participants' sense of belonging within the Suryoday community. Collaborative art-making and rhythm activities encouraged teamwork, listening, and shared creativity.

Results and Learnings: Participants gradually became more comfortable interacting with peers outside their usual groups. Increased participation, communication, and confidence were observed during creative activities. Art-making provided an important way for participants to express ideas and emotions beyond verbal communication.

The project demonstrated how arts-based practices can strengthen social connection and inclusion among adults with diverse abilities. Future initiatives could benefit from longer engagement periods to support deeper relationships and sustained community participation.

Title: Arts-Based Practices for Inclusion in a School Community

Practitioner: Pratiksha Bhagya SK

City, State: Bengaluru, Karnataka

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted at Bangalore International School as part of the Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) program. The project worked with a small core group of 5–6 students and occasionally included larger peer groups. Participants represented diverse social and emotional needs, including hesitation in peer interaction, sensory sensitivities, and challenges with emotional regulation.

Across eight sessions conducted during Term 3, the project aimed to create safe spaces that encouraged participation, emotional regulation, and collaborative engagement within the school community.

Approach: The sessions used arts-based and sensory-informed practices such as movement, rhythm exercises, tactile exploration, collaborative art-making, cooking, music, dance, environmental engagement, and cooperative play.

Each session followed the API structure of Circling, Warming, Creating, and Closure, providing a predictable framework that supported psychological safety. Activities gradually progressed from individual regulation to partner collaboration and participation within larger peer groups.

Key Areas of Engagement: The project focused on social inclusion, emotional development, and adaptability. Activities encouraged peer interaction, cooperation, and turn-taking while providing non-verbal ways for emotional expression. Sensory grounding through breath, rhythm, and tactile engagement supported self-regulation.

Shared tasks such as cooking and cleaning encouraged students to see themselves as contributing members of a community.

Results and Learnings: Students gradually showed greater confidence, participation, and willingness to collaborate with peers. Initially hesitant participants began sustaining group engagement and trying new activities.

Collaborative outcomes such as group artwork and cooking fostered teamwork and a sense of belonging. The project demonstrated how structured arts-based practices can support inclusion, emotional safety, and peer connection within school environments.

Title: Arts Practices for Inclusion: Community-Based Inclusion at Deepika School

Practitioner: Reshma Anjum

City, State: Bengaluru, Karnataka

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted at Deepika School in Bengaluru with mixed-age groups of children with special needs aged 10–18 years. Participants had diverse developmental profiles, including differences in communication, emotional regulation, cognition, and sensory processing.

Across twelve sessions, the project aimed to strengthen emotional wellbeing, social participation, and inclusion through arts-based activities and community engagement within the school environment.

Approach: The sessions used arts-based and embodied practices such as movement, rhythm, visual arts, sensory exploration, and collaborative rituals, following the API facilitation framework.

The programme progressed in three phases: initial sessions focused on emotional safety and self-expression; middle sessions introduced collaborative activities and guided visits to community spaces such as a temple, police station, and post office; later sessions emphasized responsibility through activities like organizing the library, helping in the kitchen, cleaning campus spaces, and preparing playground areas.

Key Areas of Engagement: The project focused on emotional awareness, cooperation, and inclusive participation. Creative activities and community tasks encouraged communication, trust-building, and teamwork.

Interactions with teachers, helpers, drivers, and kitchen staff helped students understand community roles and develop empathy and respect for different forms of work.

Results and Learnings: Students showed gradual improvements in emotional expression, confidence, and participation in shared environments. Mixed-age collaboration strengthened peer support and reduced conflict.

Community work activities were particularly meaningful, giving students a sense of pride and belonging as contributors to their school community. The project demonstrated how arts-based and community-rooted practices can support inclusion and meaningful participation.

Title: Bridging Circles through Play and Arts

Practitioner: Sabitri Sanyal

City, State: Kolkata, West Bengal

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted at a Child Protection Home for Boys in Kolkata with groups of about 12–15 participants. Many boys were living in institutional care and had experienced displacement, trauma, or unstable family environments. Sessions were held in small shared spaces with changing conditions, requiring flexible facilitation. The project aimed to create safe spaces where participants could develop emotional awareness, strengthen peer relationships, and experience belonging through creative arts practices.

Approach: The sessions used visual arts, rhythm and music, theatre and puppetry, dance, and play-based activities. Each session followed a structured flow: arrival and check-in, warm-up, creative activity, sharing, and a calming closure.

Activities progressed from individual exploration to paired and group collaboration. Puppetry, freeze-frames, drumming circles, and visual journaling supported emotional expression and teamwork. Facilitation emphasized choice and flexibility, allowing children to participate in ways that felt comfortable.

Key Areas of Engagement: The project focused on emotional and social wellbeing. Creative prompts helped participants explore feelings, while breathing exercises and rhythm-based grounding supported emotional regulation.

Collaborative activities encouraged trust-building, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Appreciation circles and group rituals helped participants acknowledge each other's contributions.

Results and Learnings: Participants gradually showed greater emotional awareness and expressive confidence. They began using drawing, rhythm, gestures, and words to communicate feelings.

Socially, the group developed stronger cohesion, shifting from parallel participation to collaborative creation. The final collaborative mural became a symbol of shared identity and collective ownership. The project highlighted how arts-based practices can support emotional healing and community building among children in institutional care.

Title: PAL – Play, Arts and Love

Practitioner: Shreya Talwar

City, State: Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

Context: Project PAL (Play, Arts and Love) was conducted at Unnatee Public School in Ghaziabad, bringing together teachers aged 40–60 and students aged 5–14 in shared creative spaces. The project explored how teacher–student relationships could evolve when interaction moved beyond traditional classroom roles through arts-based engagement.

The initiative aimed to soften rigid hierarchies and allow teachers and students to encounter each other as individuals, exploring themes of identity, emotional expression, and everyday experiences within the school community.

Approach: The project used arts practices, storytelling, play, and collective celebrations to create shared experiences. Activities included a visit to a gurudwara, puppet-making and storytelling, attending a live musical performance, and preparing for a Christmas celebration together.

Movement exercises, vocal warm-ups, craft activities, and reflective discussions helped create a non-judgmental space where teachers and students could express themselves and share experiences as co-participants rather than in fixed roles.

Key Areas of Engagement: The sessions focused on building trust, familiarity, and emotional sensitivity between teachers and students. Activities encouraged storytelling, artistic expression, and empathetic listening.

Collaborative preparations for the Christmas celebration—including singing, dance rehearsals, and Secret Santa messages—strengthened community bonds and shared ownership within the school.

Results and Learnings: The project created moments where traditional power dynamics softened, allowing teachers and students to interact with curiosity and openness. Teachers gradually shifted toward listening and participating alongside students, while students showed greater agency in shaping activities.

The project highlighted how arts-based engagement can foster empathy, connection, and shared joy, while also revealing the importance of sustained creative practices to support long-term change in school environments.

Title: Bridging Differences through Arts Practices

Practitioner: Siddha Chimote

City, State: Bengaluru, Karnataka

Context: This community inclusion project was conducted at Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled in Bengaluru, where children with disabilities and neurotypical children often occupied separate spaces within the same building. The project aimed to create shared environments where both groups could interact, collaborate, and build relationships through arts-based activities, challenging divisions based on ability.

Approach: The sessions used arts practices such as movement, rhythm, storytelling, face painting, sensory art-making, cooperative games, and shared food activities. Each session followed the structure of circling, warming, creating, and closure to provide safety and predictability.

Activities were designed to encourage interaction between children from both groups. Pair-based tasks, collaborative art-making, and storytelling helped participants communicate preferences, respect boundaries, and engage with one another through creative processes.

Key Areas of Engagement: The project focused on social inclusion, emotional expression, and cooperation. Activities such as paired face painting, group dance, collaborative painting with natural materials, storytelling with costumes, and shared food preparation encouraged teamwork, empathy, and peer support.

Results and Learnings: Over time, children who initially remained separate began interacting more often during and beyond the sessions. Participants showed growing curiosity about one another and greater comfort in shared spaces.

Moments of empathy also emerged, such as peers comforting a participant who became upset. The project demonstrated that meaningful inclusion requires intentional facilitation and repeated opportunities for collaboration. Continued arts-based engagement is planned to strengthen these relationships and extend inclusive participation within the organisation.

Title: Arts for Connection

Practitioner: Supreeta D

City, State: Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Context: “Arts for Connection” was implemented at Ashraya Bala Bhavan in Coimbatore, bringing together two groups of girls—the API group and another peer group. Although they lived in the same community, they usually interacted within separate circles. The project aimed to create opportunities for collaboration and shared experiences through structured arts-based sessions that supported emotional regulation, creativity, and social bonding.

Approach: The project used diverse art forms including rhythm and movement, visual arts, storytelling, yoga-inspired movement, mandala art, and collaborative drama. Sessions were designed around challenge, collaboration, and playful competition while maintaining a supportive environment.

Activities included rhythm exercises, painting the concept of “home,” metaphor-based reflection, collaborative movement, mandala art with a guest facilitator, color-based yoga movement, playful drama activities, and emotion-based storytelling through gesture and action.

Key Areas of Engagement: Sessions focused on creativity, emotional awareness, and group cohesion. Activities encouraged children to explore personal experiences, express identity through art and metaphor, and collaborate with peers through movement, drama, and storytelling.

Reflection circles helped participants recognize similarities and differences in each other’s perspectives, building empathy and understanding.

Results and Learnings: Distinct but complementary dynamics emerged between the two groups. The API group often modeled structure and grounding practices, while the other group brought energy and spontaneity.

Through interaction, children learned from one another, gradually developing greater emotional awareness, self-regulation, and confidence in creative expression. The project highlighted how arts-based practices can strengthen empathy, collaboration, and social integration within community settings.

Title: My Neighbourhood Museum

Practitioner: Yuktika Pilania

City, State: Jaipur, Rajasthan

Context: “My Neighbourhood Museum” was a community-based expressive arts project conducted at Naya Saweera’s Sarthak Old Age Home in Jaipur. The initiative viewed the everyday memories, skills, and practices of older adults as living cultural knowledge rather than simply seeing them as institutional residents.

The project functioned as a participatory archive shaped through shared activities and relationships. It aimed to reduce social isolation, support emotional wellbeing, and strengthen collective identity among residents through creative and sensory engagement.

Approach: The project unfolded in three phases. The first focused on building safety and familiarity through routine-based activities such as cooking, craft-making, and festival celebrations.

The second phase introduced symbolic storytelling activities like the Story Archive, Life Map Installation, and Future Letters, allowing participants to share experiences through speaking, drawing, or quiet observation.

The final phase emphasized reflection and connection through yoga-based movement and shared music sessions that created a calm, non-verbal space for engagement.

Key Areas of Engagement: The sessions focused on reducing isolation, encouraging relational presence, and honouring everyday knowledge. Activities highlighted skills such as cooking, crafts, and life experiences as valuable cultural contributions.

Intergenerational interactions with visiting children and collaborative activities strengthened social connection and shared participation.

Results and Learnings: Participation gradually increased as residents became more comfortable with the sessions. Routine-based activities created familiarity, while music and shared storytelling fostered relaxation, humour, and conversation.

The project showed that meaningful inclusion in institutional settings develops slowly through patience, familiarity, and respect for everyday practices. It highlighted the importance of recognizing older adults as knowledge-holders whose experiences form a living cultural archive.

Snehadhara Foundation

Snehadhara Foundation (SF), established in 2012 and headquartered in Bangalore, is a pioneering non-profit dedicated to Arts Practices for Inclusion (API). SF places arts at the core of teaching and learning, fostering inclusion as the cornerstone of a compassionate society. Through service-based initiatives, community engagement, and policy advocacy, SF has directly impacted over 12,500 children and adults, reached 75,000 individuals globally, and trained over 3,500 professionals from 550 organizations across eight countries, including India, Nepal, and Canada.

SF works with neurodiverse individuals and vulnerable groups, offering direct care and training for educators, psychologists, practitioners, and corporate leaders. Its mission is to empower individuals through arts practices, foster Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and influence policies to promote a compassionate, inclusive society. Using the arts as a transformative tool, SF creates spaces that support the social, emotional, and cognitive development of individuals with special needs and marginalized communities.

SF operates through three verticals: Direct Care, which provides holistic programs for neurodiverse individuals and vulnerable groups, including semi-residential care, one-on-one sessions, collaborations with government schools, and the Sangam program fostering community engagement and inclusion; impART, which focuses on cultivating empathy and inclusivity within educational institutions and corporate environments through training, capacity building, and arts-based outreach projects that reimagine learning spaces; and Prajnadhara, which offers the one-year Arts Practices for Inclusion (API) certification course, launched internationally in 2019, that has trained over 170 practitioners in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Argentina, building a global network of changemakers advancing inclusion and driving sustainable change.

